

Touch the Water

A River Play

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A River Play

SETTING: THE LOS ANGELES RIVER

A Sycamore tree hangs over the Los Angeles River in an area with concrete banks and a natural bottom. Water flows gently past an abandoned car jutting from the riverbed of sand, rocks and wild plants. A place of unexpected natural beauty laced with plastic bags, trash and a wayward shopping cart.

Above the river, a dilapidated house marks the end of *Rio* Street in a working class neighborhood. The back porch of the house looks out at the river and the city beyond. A multi-million dollar view from a falling down shack covered in vines, a building being reclaimed by nature. A paper sign is tacked to the wall-- "Condemned Property." Further downstream, a scraggly community garden attempts to survive.

CHARACTERS:

Luis Otcho-o , a neighborhood son, recently released from prison

Isa Pino, a neighborhood gardener, mourning the loss of her little brother

Ruth Betsy, the Duck Lady, lives in a car in the riverbottom

Cachoo, a young neighborhood beauty

Sneezy, Cachoo's quiet friend

Officer Jack Hammer, Parks and Recreation enforcer

Joe Swift, a biologist with the Army Corps of Engineers

Roger Vadim!, radical activist extraordinaire

Jade Kenton-Denton Green, green architect, sustainability activist

Maniisar, ghost of a Tong-va girl killed in the river long ago

Ridley, a wandering Sea Turtle

Corvus, a formidable Crow

Carmelo, a fly fisherman, who practices catch-and-release

Omar, a subsistence fisherman who eats what he catches

The Chorus of Flora and Fauna (possibilities)

Ardea, a Great Blue Heron

Ana C, a Cinnamon Teal (*Anas cyanoptera*)

Ana P, a Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)

Fremont, a Catfish

Procyon, a Raccoon

Arundo donax, a noxious weed

El Aliso, a giant Sycamore

Twilight

The Chorus of Flora and Fauna SHUSHES, CROAKS, CALLS, CREAKS, HISSES, GILLFULLY BREATHEs, WHOOSHES, WHISTLES, LILTS, SQUEAKS and CAW-CAW-CAWS as the sun sinks lower in the sky across the river. Unseen, we hear Maniisar's voice translating the Tong-va chant, *Pe-shaax taa met...*

MANIISAR

The sun is going down.

(ROGER VADIM!, an activist in an ascot, slips out to the concrete banks of the river. He carries a JACKHAMMER. He has a French accent. He addresses the audience directly at times. Like now.)

ROGER VADIM!

Touch the water, man, that's the instruction from the gods, touch the water where you live or you will not know where you are.

(Looking and listening to the rich river world)

This is why people in L.A. feel disconnected, we can't touch our water. Can't even see it. Most people don't even know we have a river-- a fierce Western river that's the reason the city was founded here-- the sole, soulful, source of water for thousands of years. When people say there is no center in Los Angeles, no *there* there... what they don't know is the *River* is the center-- and she has been eclipsed, hidden under a concrete shroud. But the Mighty Los Angeles is not dead, she flows underground.

(Crossing down to the water)

Why is the river so green here... more like a river than the man-made flood channel we know from the movies, hmmm? Because the water never stops flowing long enough for concrete to harden. It bubbles up from the aquifer, never dry. The Army Corps of Engineers would have paved it over, but they couldn't. The river refused. She fights back right here. She lives right here.

(Touching the water)

People are 98%, or 78 or 80 or something-- we're mostly made of water, man, so touching the water is like going home.

(Rubs water on his face)

But don't drink it. We're not there yet. But we can get there

(Crossing back to his jackhammer)

Okay, vision for the future-- it's in my pocket, but it's paper and my hands are wet-- so-- it's okay. I know what it looks like. The politicians, the environmentalists, the *la-la-la-ti-da*'s-- also have a vision for the future-- but it floats mild and far, far away! Immediate action must be taken!

(Gets set with the jackhammer)

What the flip, man, no more waiting. Let the people see Nature, man, let them touch it, it will heal them. Free the river from her concrete corset!

(Roger JACK-HAMMERS into the concrete.
Chips and dust fly up in a cloud.)

(A ferocious and terrible SCREAM comes from
the little house.)

(Roger stops, listens)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT (O.S.)
I am the river! Luis Otcho-o ! I am the river!

ROGER VADIM!
Wow. The river, she is speaking to me-- Otcho-o?

(Luis Otcho-o APPEARS on his porch. Drunk,
carrying a six-pack of beer, his guitar strapped to
his back.)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
Don't call me she--

(Roger spins to see Luis Otcho-o .)

ROGER VADIM!
Dude, you scared me. Is your name Otcho-o? The ancient name for the river?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
Yes, yo, I am the river. And I ain't female.

ROGER VADIM!
The river is beyond gender, I get it. Like god, man.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
You don't get anything. What are you doing?

ROGER VADIM!

I am releasing the Otcho-mojo of it all. I'm saving the river, man. I am extremist, the main stream can't hold me, man. I am releasing the Main Stream from her corset.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

(swigging beer throughout) Um-hm. Ain't' no 'her', friend. Ever seen it flood? Nothing female about that rockin' and rollin'.

ROGER VADIM!

Either way the concrete is choking Nature, baby. Capital N Nature.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Best thing we can do is leave Nature alone, bro. Takes care of itself, don't need our help.

ROGER VADIM!

In fact, it does.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Jack it up, brother, I'll sit here and watch you hang.

ROGER VADIM!

(reaching into his pocket) Would you sign my petition-- I have a vision for the future of the river--

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

You don't want me on your list, I'm a convicted felon. Can't vote.

(Roger puts his paper away)

Anyway, I'm telling you-- better to leave the natural state alone.

(Roger resumes jack-hammering)

ROGER VADIM!

Too late! We must respond to the police action of the Army Corps of Engineers. Those suckers see a winding river, straighten it the flip out. Thinking like a slide-rule, feeling like an arrow in the dark, can't see who it hits, but it feels so good to shoot. Free the river to snake across the land! When will we learn from Nature, capital N, man?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

What you're doing ain't natural.

ROGER VADIM!

Making amends. Atoning for the sins of my brothers at the Army Corps. My brothers in City Hell. My sisters who fear the bursting floodbanks. I'm a natural man.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

With an ascot.

ROGER VADIM!

Free the river!

(Roger has busted open quite a hole in the concrete. A young girl adorned in white Egret feathers and yellow Datura blossoms, MANIISAR, floats up through the hole from the Earth below, accompanied by music. She hovers above Roger, taking in the surroundings-- confused, breathing ragged and deep. She has a red geometric snake design on her forehead.)

MANIISAR

(a raspy whisper) Who called me?

CORVUS

(flying down from the tree) Caw Caw Caw. Attention! Pay Attention!

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

(sees Maniisar, appreciates the vision) Frogtown, baby. Anything can happen.

ROGER VADIM!

(does not see Maniisar, but feels a cold wind) What? What just happened?

(Rasping for breath, Maniisar takes the crow's place in the Sycamore Tree. She looks around, dangerous as a hungry bear in spring.)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

You change one thing, you change it all.

ROGER VADIM!

What? I feel a chill. (looks up at the cloudy sky) I think it's going to rain tonight. Okay, my work is done for now-- (hoisting his jack-hammer) If anyone asks how this hole got here-- tell them it was Roger Vadim!

(Roger Vadim! EXITS.)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
Roger Vadim?

(Luis Otcho-o kicks back with his beer and his guitar, sing. Maniisar joins in. The Chorus of Flora and Fauna accompanies them. Though the words are lovely, Maniisar has the air of a predator.)

MANIISAR
Beauty above me, Beauty below

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
What are you doing here?

MANIISAR & LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
Beauty all around me, Beauty that flows

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
Who are you?

MANIISAR
Maniisar, hungry daughter of the Chief. I have been trapped under the stone, but now I'm free.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
Cool. Luis Otcho-o , son of nobody, recently out of the joint-- drunk and talking to ghosts.

MANIISAR
*Birds, fish, cattails and reeds
Memories flood my mind
These prayers that petition and plead
What am I called here to find,*

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
(spoken, looking around at the river) I come back here, but is it still my home? Must be, I got nowhere else.

MANIISAR & LUIS
*Through the rocky riverbed, may I wade.
With minnows 'round my feet, may I wade.
With herons 'bove my head, may I wade.*

With turtles in the heat, (may I wade.)

*With beauty before me, may I wade
With beauty behind me, may I wade
With beauty above me, may I wade
With beauty all around me, may I wade.*

*In childhood, wandering on a trail of beauty, lively did I wade
A lifetime, wandering on a trail of beauty, (Living again, may I wade)*

(RIDLEY, a Sea Turtle swims upstream. He has a fishhook in his back leg and his shell is torn. A continuation/variation of the song.)

RIDLEY

*I am lost. In shallow, frigid waters, that taste a little off
I am lost. Humans trying to hook me, I've got this little cough
I have lost my connection to the flow of what has made me who I am.*

*I'm feeling tossed. Danger all around me, no place to run and hide
I'm double-crossed, I used to know how to survive,
Believe me I have tried
I have lost my connection to the flow of what has made me who I am.*

*Sliding on moss, stranded in a channel, far away from my home
What's the cost? My moment in the sun, which has come and which has flown
I have lost my connection to the flow of what I am.*

RIDLEY & LUIS & MANIISAR

*And now Death hovers above me, the dead linger below
See how death circles around me, death swallows me whole*

(As Ridley struggles up the concrete bank, Luis Otcho-o goes back into his house.)

MANIISAR

Death is not the end.

RIDLEY

Really? I doubt it.

MANIISAR

You doubt life after death?

RIDLEY

This is it.

MANIISAR
What am I?

RIDLEY
I don't want to be a ghost. I want to swim in warm waters, bask in the sun, tumble in waves with my own kind. Where's the sand, where's the tide in this place?

MANIISAR
What are you doing here, you're a sea turtle, you belong in the ocean.

RIDLEY
My colony lives in the lower river now and we're getting too big. I'm an explorer, looking for a new home.

MANIISAR
Unconnected to your kin, you are only food--

(Maniisar flies at him, Ridley faces her .)

RIDLEY
Stay away from me, Hungry Ghost!

MANIISAR
Will you doubt my existence if I devour you?!

RIDLEY
I'd like to see you get through this shell!

MANIISAR
I'll eat your soul, not your flesh.

RIDLEY
Big talk for a little girl.

(Maniisar laughs, flies back to her perch.)

MANIISAR
Am I a girl, am I a ghost?

RIDLEY
Don't know.

MANIISAR
I'm a river-ghost girl. (looking around) What have they done to my river?

RIDLEY

Is this the river? I thought this was a ditch on the way to the river.

MANIISAR

Used to flow mighty right here. *Otcho-o.*

(Ridley finds a storm-drain pipe to hide in.)

RIDLEY

This is going to be harder than I thought. I'll rest up, do more exploring after I get my strength back.

(Maniisar and the Chorus of Flora and Fauna briefly reprise their subtle symphony, as in the beginning. A quiet twilight moment on the river.)

MANIISAR

*In childhood, wandering on a trail of beauty, lively did I wade
A lifetime, wandering on a trail of beauty, (Living again, may I wade)*

(During the song, ISA PINO, a neighborhood woman, ENTERS the community garden, a sack of gardening supplies slung heavily across her shoulders. She carries a Sage plant. As Isa Pino settle in to the garden, two fishermen appear in the distance-- CARMELO and OMAR. Suddenly, Corvus swoops in to ATTACK the ducklings. The CHORUS protests.)

CORVUS

Caw, caw, caw!

ISA PINO

(Shooing the Crow away from the ducklings) Stop it, old Crow, get out of here!

CORVUS

We're all food for someone, my friend.

ISA PINO

The ducklings just want a little peace.

CORVUS

So say the yummy morsels.

ISA PINO
I wonder how Roasted Crow tastes...?

CORVUS
(horrified, flying off) You disrespect a sacred bird! Caw-- caw-- caw!

ISA PINO
No worries, little ducks.

(Isa Pino plants a skateboard in the ground with the Sage, as a teen-age girl, CACHOO, ambles by, videotaping with a cellphone.)

CACHOO
Hey, Isa Pino! What's up?

ISA PINO
Hey, Cachoo.

(Isa sees the phone camera.)
What are you doing with that thing? Don't point it at me.

CACHOO
I'm making a video for my class, about the river. Our secret downtown freeway river.

ISA PINO
Is that your title?

CACHOO
Maybe. (pointing to the skateboard) Is that Rana's skateboard? Why're you sticking it in the ground?

ISA PINO
I'm dedicating this corner of the garden to him.

CACHOO
He's not buried there, is he?

ISA PINO
No. I thought he could keep me company while I work.

CACHOO
His ghost?

ISA PINO

I don't know. I've been staring at his skateboard since... since he... I thought I should do something with it.

CACHOO

Cool. Rana was a mad skater. He'd like the skateboard tombstone.

ISA PINO

Not a tombstone exactly, just a reminder.

CACHOO

That plant's not gonna make it, though.

ISA PINO

It's a native sage, it should do okay. Hey, why don't you bring some tomato seeds or something, I'll help you get them sprouted.

CACHOO

Doubtful.

ISA PINO

Come on, it's hard to have a community garden if I'm the only one planting...

CACHOO

Isa, this is like Death Row for plants. You have a Black Thumb. Want to be in my film?

ISA PINO

Not really.

CACHOO

Come on-- tell me what it was like, growing up on the river.

ISA PINO

You know, Cachoo, you grew up here.

(Cachoo turns the phone-camera on herself.)

CACHOO

We dragged a sofa down into the tall weeds and smoked pot. You?

(Turns the phone-camera on Isa Pino--)

ISA PINO

I had my first kiss in those weeds.

CACHOO
Details... I need details.

ISA PINO
(Smiling) No way.

CACHOO
What else? Why you planting a garden on the river?

ISA PINO
(touches the skateboard--) Rana was killed here.

MANIISAR
Is it you who called me?

(Isa Pino looks to Maniisar-- sees an Egret.)

ISA PINO
Did that Egret call? What does an Egret's call sound like?

(Cachoo CALLS like an Egret... or something.)

ISA PINO
That's not right--

(Maniisar CALLS BACK, mimicking Cachoo, who runs toward Maniisar, aiming her phone-camera and SHRIEKING a crazy Egret Call. Maniisar FLAPS and WARBLER, distressed.)

ISA PINO
Cachoo, leave that bird alone.

(Cachoo switches direction, heads downstream where a subsistence fisherman, OMAR, sets up near Carmelo.)

CACHOO
Alright, I'm going to interview Carmelo. Maybe he'll tell me a story.

(Cachoo heads for Carmelo and Omar. They exit as Isa Pino addresses the Egret, Maniisar.)

ISA PINO
Sorry she scared you.

MANIISAR

Are you the one who called me?

(Isa Pino doesn't understand, only hears an Egret on the river. Isa gently makes an Egret call.)

(Maniisar notices Luis Otcho-o step onto his porch. She CALLS and POINTS in that direction, Isa turns and sees him.)

(Isa and Luis stare at one another.)

ISA PINO

What are you doing here?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

I was released last week. (slightly ironic) Good behavior.

ISA PINO

How could you come back here?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Where else would I go?

ISA PINO

No. No, you can't come back here.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

I live here.

ISA PINO

No, I live here. You can't... I can't... see you everyday. You have to leave.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Isa--

ISA PINO

Don't say my name, you can't say my name.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Okay.

ISA PINO

I don't want you here.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
You got no say on where I live.

(He SPITS.)

ISA PINO
How can you show your face here after what you did?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
I didn't do nothing.

ISA PINO
Yeah. Exactly. You did nothing.

(Luis is shamed.)

ISA PINO
You can't live here.

(Luis Otcho-o slams chords on his guitar, loud and aggressive.)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
How you going to stop me?

(She doesn't know, she turns, starts walking away.
Luis hits chords, speaks over them.)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
I am this river, muck and all
Wounded, scarred, choked with crap
Still not still
Flowing forward a drop at a time
Still not still
No matter what you say

(Isa Pino turns back to him. He continues to play,
while she speaks over his chords.)

ISA PINO
No. My mother, my father, my brother, myself
We are the River, not you.
For three years I've prayed in this garden and heard nothing
And now you show up-- No--
Leave!

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

I have no where to go

I'm like the river waiting for the rain

Is there no hope for me, Isa?

ISA PINO

(frustrated, angry) Hope?!

(Luis screeches a terrible chord on his guitar and disappears inside his house. Isa watches him go, then turns to the river.)

ISA PINO

Mother, I call you

I hear you in the trees, whispering, gentling me back

Daddy, I call you

I feel you in the water, cooling me down, feet on the ground

Rana, dear brother, I call you

Come back to me, where are you?

Why can't I hear you Rana? Why do I never hear you?

(looking toward Luis's house) You'll never come back as long as he is here--

MANIISAR

You called him. You called me. You're calling us all.

(From inside his house, Luis Otcho-o SCREAMS, as in the beginning. Isa HURLS ROCKS at his house. A lone kayaker suddenly appears floating downstream-- JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN. She wears a helmet, speaks into a head mic. Isa watches her from the bank.)

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

Let's talk Drought. We do not live in a desert as is often mistakenly said, we live in a *Mediterranean* climate, and our defining geologic feature is the Los Angeles River, which-- before it was so rudely interrupted by men short on vision and long on concrete-- flowed in a natural cycle for nine thousand years.

(As Jade Kenton-Denton Green nears, Isa falls back into the shadows.)

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

Let me repeat that-- for *Nine Thousand Years* this river flowed unimpeded-- a 'Tramp River' that changed its course annually, the wild, wet core of one of the largest and most verdant river basins in the country.

(A flotilla of river tourists in kayaks appears behind Jade Kenton-Denton Green. They all wear helmets and headsets, listening to her lecture, looking around at the animals and plants. They never speak, but they do try to touch the Chorus of Flora and Fauna, which shrink from them. They take photos. [JOE SWIFT is one of the kayakers]. Isa has never seen anything like this.)

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

Let's put out and have a snack up here.

(Jade Kenton-Denton Green and her tour get out of their kayaks and re-organize on the banks. She talks all the while. Isa hides, observing them.)

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

The Spanish explorers landed in summer, mystified that the Native Americans, the Gabrielino/Tong-va--

(Maniisar calls out in response to her tribal name. Ridley sticks his head out of the pipe.)

MANIISAR

Tong-va!

RIDLEY

What does that mean?

MANIISAR

It's my tribe.

(The tourist-kayakers settle in to snack and rest.)

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

...mystified that the Tong-va who lived with the river for *Nine Thousand Years*, put their village away from the water. Explorers learned why the hard way... when the river flooded and destroyed them. Flooding is natural, flooding is necessary, flooding is good for the Earth, but not so much for people who build in floodplains. We re-learned this ever few years-- until we tamed the Ancient River with concrete.

By protecting ourselves from flood so we could build, build, build with asphalt, concrete and other impermeable surfaces, our groundwater never gets replenished. The rain, the snowmelt, reclaimed water of every kind gets flushed into the channel and rushed to the ocean. A water freeway! We have protected ourselves from floods, but now we have no water. So we buy it from other rivers. Insane.

We have broken the water cycle We need to capture and reuse our water, people. Let the rain soak the ground-- we need to rebel like the river, refuse to be encased in a dry Heat Island. Luckily, concrete is not permanent-- the channel will only last another 20 years, then it has to be replaced. Might as well do it right this time! Green space, parks, bike paths, walkways connecting us to the river, the center, the original water.

(Getting worked up.)

We can't breathe in this city, we are dying of thirst and we can't breathe! We need clean water, shade, trees! Water, water!

(A kindly kayaker offers Jade a plastic bottle of water. Jade is horrified.)

Plastic! I said no plastic! Ack! More proof of the insanity of man-- create a substance that never breaks down and call it disposable. What?!

JOE SWIFT

Jade, calm down, we have to do things in small steps-- a little bit at a time.

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

The truth must be told! (pointing to the river) We're poisoning the water--

JOE SWIFT

Actually, this water's pretty clean-- 60 million gallons of recycled wastewater gets discharged into the channel every day--

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

It's not a channel, it's a river!

JOE SWIFT

The wastewater is decontaminated and supports the river habitat.

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

'Wastewater', (to the kayakers, translating) ...*aka* sewage.

JOE SWIFT

We could recycle all our water to drinking quality but it's expensive--

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

Not as expensive as shipping it from the Sacramento, the Colorado, and the Owens Valley.

JOE SWIFT

Recycled wastewater has gotten bad press. Somebody called it Toilet to Tap, and that was it.

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

Wait'll we get thirsty enough... we'll be begging for recycled water. (brandishing the plastic water bottle) We think if we buy it in plastic it's somehow new, but what water on this Earth is not recycled? Every drop on the planet has been through clouds, earth, bodies, trees-- many times. .

(Isa Pino steps out of the shadows. A Kayaker takes her photograph with a FLASH.)

ISA PINO

You need to leave. This is gang territory.

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

Excuse me?

ISA PINO

It's dangerous. You don't want to be here at night.

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

I think we're okay--

ISA PINO

No, you're not. You won't see them until it's too late. Believe me, you should go.

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

What about you?

ISA PINO

I live here. They won't mess with me.

(All the kayakers rush away, except Joe Swift. Jade chases after them.)

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

Wait, don't be scared-- the more people at the river the safer it is!

KAYAKERS

I didn't sign up for getting shot at. I'm outta here. Can I get my money back?

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

How about a raincheck? We can come back in the morning...

(Joe Swift and Isa eye each other.)

ISA PINO

You should go, too.

JOE SWIFT

I'm on the river all the time.

(Removing his helmet)

Actually, I haven't seen a lot of gangs around here.

ISA PINO

Mostly we have *veteranos*.

JOE SWIFT

Old guys who used to be in gangs.

(She nods.)

You just wanted to get rid of us.

ISA PINO

I don't like being gawked at like I'm an animal at the zoo.

JOE SWIFT

Uh-oh...

(They see a Parks and Rec cop, OFFICER JACK HAMMER, patrolling in the distance.)

ISA PINO

Better hide your kayak.

JOE SWIFT

Not against the law to *carry* a kayak. If I'm not in the channel he can't do anything.

ISA PINO

(indicating a bird on the river.) I'm surprised they don't try to ticket the birds.

JOE SWIFT
Ardea herodias. Great Blue Heron.

ISA PINO
She'll stand there still for hours waiting for a fish to go by.

(Isa Pino watches him get out a sketch pad.)

How come you know his scientific name?

JOE SWIFT
I'm a biologist. I'm going to draw her.

(As Joe Swift sits and begins to sketch, Maniisar sings. The Chorus of Flora and Fauna joins in.)

ISA PINO
*Teach me the ways of water, float me your truth and lie,
Drown me in absolution, dry me these tears, these tears I cry.*

(Isa watches him for a moment, transported to another time, another boy sketching the river. She SEES HER LITTLE BROTHER, RANA, sitting in the distance, sketching, peaceful.)

MANIISAR
*A boy on the river dreaming, sketching an indelible sun
Twilight's final gleaming, glinting on the barrel and the trigger of a gun
It's long since the sound of screaming, was stifled by a calloused heart
Some meetings by the river skirt meaning, but never fail to do us in and
tear us apart*

(SOUND OF A GUNSHOT.)

(RANA REACTS VIOLENTLY AS IF SHOT.
LIGHTS OUT ON HIM. Isa draws back,
startled by the vision/memory.)

MANIISAR
*Teach me the ways of water, float me your truth and lie
Drown me in absolution, dry me these tears, these tears I cry.*

JOE SWIFT
Are you alright?

ISA PINO

What are you doing here?

JOE SWIFT

I'm studying the river system.

ISA PINO

Who do you work for?

JOE SWIFT

I'm trying to see the complexity of the riparian system--

ISA PINO

Who do you work for?

JOE SWIFT

The Army Corps of Engineers. (She's not impressed.) I'm making a report on the river system as a whole, I want to understand all the parts, including people, access.

ISA PINO

(starting to leave) The Army Corps doesn't care about people--

JOE SWIFT

We're changing, we have to. We want to adapt the system so it works with Nature instead of trying to control it. As always our main objective is to protect the city from flooding, but we can do that and add greenspace..

ISA PINO

What are you doing in our neighborhood?

JOE SWIFT

We're going to green this street, take this house down--

(He points to Luis Otcho-o's condemned home.)

Put in a pocket park that filters stormwater before it's released into the river.

ISA PINO

You're going to demolish that house?

JOE SWIFT

Yeah, the City bought it a few weeks ago.

ISA PINO

Somebody's living there.

JOE SWIFT

The woman we bought it from moved out.

ISA PINO

Her son is living there. He just got out of prison.

JOE SWIFT

I'll have to talk to him.

(She stares at him.)

ISA PINO

I didn't know anything about this greening thing.

JOE SWIFT

We went house to house.

ISA PINO

I live in an apartment building.

JOE SWIFT

The one with the locked gate and the dogs? (She nods.) We gave up on that one.
(beat) It's a good thing-- we'll put in native plants and trees, fix the sidewalks--

ISA PINO

What if I started 'improving' your neighborhood-- so me and my friends could hang out there-- parked in your driveway, tromped through your yard, took pictures of you in your natural habitat-- gang member Latinos down by the river, right? Both 'local' and 'exotic.' Do you wonder if I'm Mexican-- a citizen? Am I Philipino? Chinese? Korean? Born here or an immigrant?

JOE SWIFT

(reassuring her) We don't care about your immigration status.

ISA PINO

My mother's family has lived here for four generations-- Chavez Ravine before Elysian Valley, Sonora Town before that. When I-5 got built-- we lost our doctor's office, the grocery store, the bakery. Taken out by nice guys like you who promised us things would be better. My grandmother worked in the sweatshop on Newell Street, fished in the river, taught me to pray at the river because we didn't have clothes to go to church. We don't have much in this neighborhood, but we have the river. We need it and we will be here long after it's fashionable-- unless, we have to move because we can't afford the rent anymore.

JOE SWIFT
Okay.

ISA PINO
Okay?

JOE SWIFT
I understand everything you said. What would be good for the neighborhood?

ISA PINO
Fence for the community garden. Skateboard park for the kids. Protection from the gang that uses the river for everything from rape to execution and the cops won't stop it-- afraid to come in here because there's only one street in, one out. Anything can happen down at the river-- and has. My 13 year old brother was shot to death in broad daylight because he had the same name as a gang leader. Rana Ferko wanted to be the only Rana around. The police didn't come for two hours. The ambulance never came, just the coroner. The only cop we have gives people tickets for fishing.

JOE SWIFT
I want to help.

ISA PINO
Bring my brother back.

JOE SWIFT
I'm sorry about your brother.

(Isa Pino nods, then returns to her gardening. Joe grabs his gear and takes off. Isa SINGS "The Gardener's Song.")

ISA PINO
*Planting is a prayer
That brings me to my knees
Unearthing all the layers, enfolding tender seeds
Dirt in my fingers as it will be in the end
Where do the dead go?*

MANIISAR
Here I am.

ISA PINO

*Return to me, dear Rana, digging and digging I pray
I hear our Daddy and mama, through the song of the river they say:
Purge this sadness from your heart so it may mend
Where do the dead go?*

MANIISAR

Here I am.

ISA PINO

*Give me a sign little brother, have you found peace?
The weight that's on my shoulders cries out for release
I wait with a hopeless heart... Where do the dead go?*

*Planting is a prayer that brings me to my knees
Unearthing all the layers to find out what is real
Dirt in my fingers as it will be in the end.
I put this sage into the ground so you may mend.*

(As it begins to RAIN, Isa Pino EXITS.)

(From inside his house, Luis Otcho-o SCREAMS
as in the beginning. It **RAINS**.)

Night (After the Rain)

(During the continuing RAIN the Chorus chants,
Yaa wakookre.)

MANIISAR

(translating) Now, it's raining. (then, reaching for the rain--) I miss the rain...

(CORVUS, the Crow swoops down, snatches an
egg from a Mallard's nest. The Mallard
SCREECHES and FLAPS.

As the RAIN SUBSIDES the SOUND OF
GIRLISH LAUGHTER precedes the
ENTRANCE of CACHOO and SNEEZY, two
stoned young women.)

CACHOO

I love it after it rains! The air is so amazing, the stars. And the river rushes like a real river. Is this place magical? I know it's stupid, I know, but is it?

SNEEZY

What's magic anyway?

CACHOO

Exactly. Being connected to something you don't understand but seems to be real even though it's invisible and you have no control, but you're like in the flow with it, so even if you don't know what you're doing, if you're like in the moment, then you're part of this bigger... flow thing.

SNEEZY

Like the Universe is creative and we have to collaborate with it.

CACHOO

Right? I mean maybe everything is random and like scientifically cause and effect like physics and whatnot, but sheeee-itt, girl, even that, I mean I'm not going to say that magic is not scientific, you know what I mean?

(Sneezy smiles, there's not stopping Cachoo.)

CACHOO

Radio waves were magic back in the day, right? And now we got chips the size of brain cells-- where we going to put that shit, right? In our brains! And if that's not magic. But that's not what I'm talking about. It's the river, man. We have a river in the middle of L.A., Sneezy.

SNEEZY

Birds, flowing water, frogs, trees swaying in the breeze...a big rising moon...

CACHOO

Magic. Right?

SNEEZY

Hola, la luna.

(Sneezy does a magic dance, circling to the six directions, calling the spirits-- a kind of Native American Rap Jig. Maniisar sings. So does Luis who sits on his porch.)

Hola la Luna, low in the sky, nightshadows on the river

*Rising and falling, pulling the water
Like breath for now and forever*

*Rivertide, rivertide, no such thing they say
Rivertide, rivertide, if it's not real,
What's this I feel everyday?*

*Rio del padre, madre la luna, husband and wife forever
Cleansing and lightening, shining and sparkling,
Fighting upon the river
Moonlight ride, Riverwide
Give us relief from the day.
Moonlit tide, riverwide
Bathe us in light, soften us so we can play.*

*(Bridge)
Shine on mi madre, mi loca amiga, we'll swim in your milky white light
Mi sangre, Mi vida, querida amiga, why do you call us tonight?
Shine down upon this silly world, shine down upon your shadow-girls
Shine down your silky rays of pearl, calm down our/their frazzled little world*

*Sedated by water, seduced by moonlight
We find our way back to our bones
Opening, closing, posing, opposing
The water wears over the stone*

*Underground, underground,
Coursing beneath our feet
Lost and found, cycles around
If it's not here, why do we feel its beat?*

(Repeat Bridge)

(The spirit of the young girl, Maniisar, calls to them from her perch in the Sycamore tree.)

MANIISAR

Sometimes you have to get out of the sun.

(Cachoo turns to Maniisar. She heard something, but can't see the little girl yet. Sneezy continues her dance, unaware that's she's opened a channel.)

CACHOO
What?

MANIISAR
Into the moonlight, to see what's real.

(Cachoo is spooked-- she heard Maniisar clearly,
but still doesn't see her. Cachoo looks around.)

The world of the real.

(Cachoo sees Maniisar in the tree.)

CACHOO
Oh my god.

MANIISAR
You asked about magic.

(Sneezy eases to the ground, ending her dance in
slumber. Cachoo looks at Sneezy, sees she's
alone with the spirit-girl. This emboldens her.)

CACHOO
What's up? Am I crazy? I know I'm a little stoned, but hey.

MANIISAR
Sometimes you have to...

CACHOO
Hey, I feel you, 'into the world of the real.' Okay. I'm coming.

(Cachoo wades, swishing water with her hands.)

CACHOO
Feels like velvet. I am the Velvet-- Fish-- Girl.

(Luis Otcho-o grabs his spear-gun.)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
Hey! Get out of there!

(He crosses out to the water, toward Cachoo.)

MANIISAR

Velvet-Fish-Girl take in the water...

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Don't you know this water's bad for you? Come on--

(Cachoo looks at Luis Otcho-o . With the moon behind his head, he looks to her like--)

CACHOO

Ohhhhh--- magic, magic--

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

You're high.

CACHOO

Are you real?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Yeah, baby, I'm real. Come on get out of there.

CACHOO

You are so beautiful.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

That's my problem, I'm too beautiful for this world. What's your name?

CACHOO

Cachoo.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Bless you.

(Cachoo laughs, doesn't correct him. Officer Jack Hammer races up out of nowhere!)

OFFICER JACK HAMMER

Halt, halt, reverse engines!

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

I'm not doing anything...

OFFICER JACK HAMMER

I'm the law, get away from the drainage channel.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
You mean the river?

OFFICER JACK HAMMER
Are you alright, miss.. miss?

CACHOO
Cachoo.

OFFICER JACK HAMMER
Bless you. What's your name?

(Cachoo just laughs.)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
This is a religious ritual, man. I'm Tong-va, she's Tong-va, we're in the middle of a
cleansing ritual in our sacred river-- Otcho-o.

CACHOO
Magic.

OFFICER JACK HAMMER
Whaaaaaa-- ???

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
She is my bride, man, my fiancé, and we are washing away the sins of the past in the
holy river waters of our ancestors.

CACHOO
Cool.

OFFICER JACK HAMMER
And the spear-gun?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
Symbolic.

OFFICER JACK HAMMER
Of?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
My manhood.

OFFICER JACK HAMMER
(embarrassed) Ah! Say no more! Okay, okay. As you were. No one s'posed to be
in the channel, I could give you a ticket.

CACHOO

This is my river. I should give you a ticket.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Quiet, my bride.

CACHOO

Ho!

OFFICER JACK HAMMER

You no say nothing, I no say nothing. You okay, Miss....?

CACHOO

Cachoo.

OFFICER JACK HAMMER AND LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Bless you.

CACHOO

Blessings on us all, brothers.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Thank you, Officer.

OFFICER JACK HAMMER

You catch fish with that manhood thing?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Carp. Big ones.

OFFICER JACK HAMMER

Can't eat that shit though.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

If you're hungry enough...

OFFICER JACK HAMMER

Alright then.

(Officer Jack Hammer begins to mosey off.)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Okay.

CACHOO

See ya. Wouldn't want to be ya.

(Luis Otcho-o , claps his hand over Cachoo's mouth, shushing her.)

OFFICER JACK HAMMER

Tong-va, huh? That's cool.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Good night, Officer.

(As Officer Jack Hammer disappears, Cachoo wrests herself free of Luis Otcho-o .)

CACHOO

Don't ever shut me up, man, what is your problem?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

I'm on probation-- I don't need any attention from the law.

CACHOO

Probation for what?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

I refused to rat and they threw me in the can.

CACHOO

Refused to rat on who? (then realizes) You're the guy who saw Rana get killed?

(Luis Otcho-o doesn't move. Yes.)

What happened, how come you didn't help him?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

(won't answer, changes subject) What were you doing in the river in the middle of the night?

(This stops her.)

CACHOO

I saw an egret... I saw...

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

You saw her, too?

(Cachoo smells something awful.)

CACHOO

Ewww, what's that smell?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

(a connoisseur) Ammonia, anti-freeze, oil.

CACHOO

Ohmygod, was I in that? What is my damage? I have to stop smoking.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

First rain's the worst. Shit's been building up on the streets for months and it all gets washed into the river.

(Ridley desperately swims out from his nook in the storm drain. He has a plastic bag wrapped around his neck. Distressed--)

RIDLEY

I'm burning! The water's burning me.

CACHOO

Look, it's a big turtle! I've never seen one so big.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Something's wrong with him--

(Ridley struggles up the concrete, panting.)

RIDLEY

My eyes, my nose, I'm on fire. The water is burning my lungs.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

It's the crap in the river.

CACHOO

Let's help him.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Leave him alone. He'll snap your hand off.

CACHOO

He needs help.

(She helps Ridley up the bank.)

Let me help you-- it's okay.

(They find a spot in the dirt, under a bush.)

RIDLEY

(Panting, desperate) I'm in trouble--

(He weakly chants--)

Death hovers above me

The dead linger below

LUIS & RIDLEY

Death circles around and

Death swallows me whole

CACHOO

What do you think he needs?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Clean water.

CACHOO

You think he's going to die?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

(hardening his emotions, turning away) I don't know.

CACHOO

He has a fishhook stuck in his foot.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

(gruff) Leave him alone, he's a wild animal, he can bite you.

CACHOO

We can't just leave him.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Best thing for him. He knows how to heal himself better than we do.

(She hesitates, unsure... then--)

CACHOO

I got to take a shower-- get this evil grime off me. (looking at Ridley) I'll check on him tomorrow.

(Cachoo crosses to her friend Sneezy, rousing her.)

Yo, Sneezzy. Let's go home.

(As the girls stumble off, Luis calls to Cachoo.)

Are you really Tong-va?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

I'm a little bit of everything, sweetheart, I'm anything you want me to be.

CACHOO

I want you to tell me what happened to Rana.

(She's gone.)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Nothing to tell.

(Maniisar calls like an Egret. Luis addresses her.)

What are you doing up there anyway?

MANIISAR

Someone called me.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Was it me?

MANIISAR

I don't know.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Why are you dressed in egret feathers?

MANIISAR

It's what I was wearing when I died. The Egret was my spirit animal.

(He strums, waits for her to continue.)

When I was a girl of eleven I danced like an Egret in the river all night--

(SINGS)

*I stole the shaman's medicine, Datura, Datura,
 What you might call a hallucinogen, the jimson weed
 They only gave it to the boys, Datura, Datura,
 (But) I wanted to experience, the demon seed.
 Datura, Datura, my spirit seeks an animal
 Datura, Datura, prepare for what you'll see!
 Datura, Datura, I saw the Egret build its nest
 I stole the healer's medicine, washed out to sea.*

*I danced along the river's edge, in Egret feathers
 I built a nest inside a hedge, and fell asleep
 I woke to the river's roar, rushing downstream
 Floating in my Egret's nest, out to sea
 Datura, Datura, I felt the spray upon my face
 Datura, Datura, I had no sense of fear,
 Datura, Datura, I took repose inside the earth,
 I danced along the river's edge, and out to sea*

(SPEAKS)

I have been in repose in the Earth for a long time. And now someone has called--

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

I think it was me.

MANIISAR

Who is your spirit animal?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

I don't know but I could use some Jimson weed. (getting a beer) How do you get a spirit animal anyway?

MANIISAR

The elders.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

(swigging beer) My elders, are how should I say-- drunks. Like me.

MANIISAR

Take the turtle.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

I'm more like a snake, slithery, sneaky, deadly.

MANIISAR

Snakes shed their skin and are reborn. The river is a snake, or it was, anyway. Snaking across the land, reborn every spring.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Reborn. Yeah... well... maybe I'm more like the dying turtle. What's he about?

(Ridley sticks his head out of the pipe, panting.)

MANIISAR

The turtle crosses the water to connect the land of the living and the land of the dead.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

He looks like he's on his way to the land of the dead.

MANIISAR

Help him.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

What can I do?

(He downs his beer, slouches out of sight as Ridley pokes his head out.)

RIDLEY

I saw the Duckling break out of her shell, waddle for the water, her mother clacking all around, and I wonder why she was spared when the Crow stole the other egg. What does it mean? Nothing. The Crow could've stolen all the eggs, or none; the Crow could devour this Duckling before the moon rises, or she may live long and reproduce. Or maybe she will eat a plastic bag and die before mating. What does it matter? The answer that comes back to me, is it doesn't. And then I wonder who is thinking this? It can't be me, I don't think such things.

But it is me now, I suppose. Am I dying? Am I dying before sunrise? Maybe that's why nothing seems to matter.

Dawn

As the deep blue light of pre-dawn begins to rise, a homeless woman, RUTH BETSY, also known as the Duck Lady, climbs out of the abandoned car in the bottom of the riverbed. Ruth Betsy scoops corn from a sack and feeds the ducks. Maniisar translates the Tong-va chant, *Ah koo yah ey ko min re ke tah met.*

MANIISAR

The sun is rising.

RUTH BETSY

Quack, quack, quack! Dear little ducklings, mornings come and mornings go, but here and now is good. *I got a glorious feeling, everything's going our way.* I keep forgetting who I used to be, but here and now is good. Damn.

(She undresses and washes herself in the river.)

RUTH BETSY

Raindrops on leaves.

Drip, drop, dripping a rhythm no one sees but me.

Prisms of light, shimmering in the sinking sun
Here and now is good.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Damn, woman, put your clothes on! Nobody wants to see all that!

RUTH BETSY

Nobody bothers you in your bathtub! Get out of my face, messing up this glorious sunrise.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Let's see... who's messing up around here...? Oh, yeah, that would be you! Parading naked in public--

RUTH BETSY

You old drunk convict, leave me alone.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Drunnnnnnnnnkkkkkkkkk yeahhhhhhhh. But on my porch, beeeee-yatch! Don't make me shoot you with my spear gun!

RUTH BETSY

Quack, quack, quack!!!

(Ruth Betsy retreats into her abandoned car.)

RUTH BETSY

Leave me alone! Quack, quack, quack, quack!

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

That's it, get back in your hidey-hole. I'm o get that hoopty towed-- with you in it!

RUTH BETSY

Why you want to torment me? I ain't hurting nobody.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

NIMBY, NIMBY, I'm o call you NIMBY--

(Ruth Betsy throws corn seed into the river, calling the ducks.)

RUTH BETSY

My name is Ruth Betsy. Quack, quack, quack-- here a quack, there a quack... the ducks love Ruth Betsy.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Your name is Not In My Back Yard-- the river is my backyard and I don't want to look at you every morning.

RUTH BETSY

I don't want to look at you either. A man who wouldn't help a child. I know who you are.

(He slams a chord on his guitar and leaves.)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

You don't know what happened! Nobody knows what happened!

(Isa Pino ENTERS--)

ISA PINO

You do.

RUTH BETSY

Quack, quack, Otcho-o!

(Ruth Betsy goes back to hide in her car, as Luis addresses Isa Pino.)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

What is your problem? You need somebody to blame? Your brother's dead, he died, get over it. I didn't kill him.

(Isa Pino goes to work in the garden.)

ISA PINO

You were there-- you could have stopped it.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Nobody could stop Ferko, he was out of his mind.

ISA PINO

You didn't even try.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

I didn't think he would kill a kid.

ISA PINO

You stood and watched.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Your kid brother shouldn't've been out alone.

ISA PINO

It was three in the afternoon! He was drawing a picture of a bird.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

And Ferko's got a life sentence-- because I didn't do it-- he did.

ISA PINO

You went to jail for protecting him--

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

I wasn't protecting him, I was afraid of him! If I'd turned on Ferko he would've had me killed-- here or in prison-- there would've been no place safe-- and it wouldn't've brought your brother back. They got Ferko without me.

ISA PINO

You stood by and watched a thirteen year old boy get shot. Luis Otcho-o , you are a coward and I will never let you forget it.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Feels good to judge me, don't it?

(He goes inside. Isa Pino stabs at the ground near her Sage plant-- a little violent. Maniisar calls like an Egret, Isa Pino turns.)

MANIISAR

You're like me the day I died, you think you know what you're doing but you don't.

(Isa Pino stops her angry gardening.)

ISA PINO

What don't I know?

MANIISAR

Channel the river.

ISA PINO

The river's been channeled too much--

(Maniisar holds one arm to the river, the other to the sky.)

MANIISAR

Channel the river. Learn the ways of water.

(Isa Pino mimics the position of Maniisar, attempting to channel the river-- to feel what the river feels. Call and response.)

ISA PINO

Flood. This river wants to flood so bad, top the banks and rush free, swallowing everything in its path. The river is angry.

MANIISAR

This river is all but dead.

ISA PINO

Human waste in the river. Hormones in the river. The river is angry.

MANIISAR

Speak, River, speak.

ISA PINO

Heavy metals in the river.

MANIISAR

Speak.

ISA PINO

Syringes in the river. Oil in the river, blood in the river

MANIISAR

Poisoned angry river, what should we do?

ISA PINO

The river wants to flood, wants to kill. The river wants vengeance.

MANIISAR

No, that's you.

ISA PINO
I am the river.

(Maniisar WARBLES like an Egret.)

Why is he alive?

(Maniisar WARBLES again.)

Why is he walking around feeling things and where is my brother? Where is he?

MANIISAR
In repose.

ISA PINO
What does that mean?

MANIISAR
Being leached clean of his wounds. Flesh falling away, bones turning to dust, no memory, no person anymore. Your brother is gone. Long live your brother.

ISA PINO
And the monster still walks around drinking beer.

MANIISAR
Is being alive the victory?

ISA PINO
I don't know, I don't know, I don't know...

MANIISAR
Channel the river.

ISA PINO
I can't.

MANIISAR
Call the animals, call the plants, call the river--

ISA PINO
The angry, poisoned river.

MANIISAR
No. The river waits. Bubbling up where it can, the river endures without anger. Call on the river to release you--

ISA PINO
Angry, poisoned me--

(Isa Pino picks up a rock to throw at Luis Yang-na's house. Maniisar stops her.)

MANIISAR
Put it in the water.

(Isa Pino hesitates.)

Let the water work the stone.

(Maniisar REPRISSES 'The Ways of Water.')

MANIISAR
*Flow through the world like water, shaper of the mountains it molds
Nothing is as strong or softer, yet wears down the grand and the mighty
and bold
Pour out your rage and fury, drain all your righteous wrath
The water's never judge or jury, it's just seeking out the easiest, the
simplest path*

(Isa Pino releases the rock so it tumbles down the embankment into the water. She WALKS OFF.)

(Joe Swift approaches Luis Yang-Na's porch.)

JOE SWIFT
Hello? Anybody in there?

(Joe crosses up to the porch, knocks on the door.)

Hello!

(No answer.)

I'm with the Army Corps of Engineers-- this property is condemned. Hello?

(Still no answer.)

Okay, I'm coming in--

(Joe opens the door, GOES IN Luis Otcho-o Authemont's house.)

JOE SWIFT (O.S.)
Anybody in here?

(Joe EXPLODES OUT the door. Luis Otcho-o
chases him with the spear-gun.)

JOE SWIFT
Aaaaaah!!! Stop, no, stop--

(Luis Otcho-o holds the spear-gun on a frozen,
terrified Joe Swift.)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
I could spear you, I got a right, you're trespassing-- I could spear you.

JOE SWIFT
No, no-- don't spear me.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
Breaking into a man's house when he's sleeping.

JOE SWIFT
It's the middle of the day.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
I can sleep when I want, mofo!

JOE SWIFT
Of course. But I'm not trespassing. The City owns this property.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
My house, I grew up here, my house.

JOE SWIFT
We bought it.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
From who?

JOE SWIFT
Your mother.

(Takes the wind out of Luis.)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
When?

JOE SWIFT

Three weeks ago.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

She knew I was getting out of the joint, she knew I had nowhere to go. Bitch. I grew up here.

(lowers the spear-gun. Joe Swift takes a breath.)

What if I stand in front of the wrecking ball-- what'll you do then?

JOE SWIFT

No wrecking ball. We'll take it down board by board.

(Luis thinks for a moment, then--)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Need workers? I'm looking for a job.

JOE SWIFT

Yeah, we could probably figure that out. I'm sorry, man.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Hey, life goes on, right? How long do I have?

JOE SWIFT

You're not supposed to be here right now.

(Luis Otcho-o thrusts the spear-gun.)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Yeah, but I am. How long before you start taking it down?

JOE SWIFT

This afternoon.

(Luis Otcho-o takes it in.)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

That's harsh. I better catch some Z's while I still got a roof over my head, huh?

(Luis Otcho-o goes inside. Joe looks around for a moment, then EXITS.)

Later That Day

(Carmelo and Omar fish in separate areas of the river, as Maniisar translates the Tong-va chant, *Sho te mii.*)

MANIISAR
The snake is crawling.

(A moment of peace. Then-- Officer Jack Hammer approaches Omar.)

OFFICER JACK HAMMER
Can't fish in the drainage channel, buddy. It's illegal.

OMAR
It's okay.

OFFICER JACK HAMMER
It's okay with you, but not with me. I'm writing you a ticket.

OMAR
No, no ticket. I'll move.

OFFICER JACK HAMMER
(pulls out a ticket book, writes Omar up) No moving-- no fishing! You can't be in the riverbed-- it's illegal! Illegal. City Ordinance 41.22.

OMAR
I got a green card.

OFFICER JACK HAMMER
How nice for you... but... Fishing. Is. Illegal.

OMAR
No, no! I am legal!

(As Omar pulls out his ID, Carmelo comes over, translates what Officer Jack Hammer is saying.)

CARMELO
Amigo-- él no es policia-- está con el Departamento de Parques.. Solamente le esta dando un ticket por pescar en el rio..

OMAR
Que? La gente no puede pescar en el rio?

CARMELO

Todavía no. Pero estamos tratando de cambiar eso.

OFFICER JACK HAMMER

Riki-tiki-tavi-- whatever, bro-- (to Carmelo) You're getting a ticket, too.

CARMELO

For what?

OFFICER JACK HAMMER

No loitering, no fishing. 41.22.

CARMELO

The City Ordinance prohibits loitering, not fishing. We're not loitering, we're recreating in a public space.

(Officer Jack Hammer checks his cheat sheet on
City Ordinances.)

OFFICER JACK HAMMER

I never heard that.

CARMELO

I'm doing catch-and-release, Officer. We're anglers. It's a sport.

OFFICER JACK HAMMER

I don't care if you eat the toxic fish--

OMAR

Tell him about the fish report--

CARMELO

They're not toxic. We did a river study--

OFFICER JACK HAMMER

Okay, Mr. Fancy Pants, step back. Eat them, don't eat them-- I got a job to do-- nobody gets in the channel when I'm on duty. It'll kill you.

CARMELO

(looking at the peaceful river) Excuse me, this is a river. If the water rises, we'll walk away. Just like people in cities all over the world with rivers running through them.

(Officer Jack Hammer stares, disgusted--)

OFFICER JACK HAMMER

Activist?

CARMELO
Citizen.

OMAR
How much?

OFFICER JACK HAMMER
How much what?

OMAR
How much the ticket?

OFFICER JACK HAMMER
Thirty-five dollars.

OMAR
Too much money.

(Omar shakes his head, but he pulls cash from his wallet and tries to pay the Officer.)

OFFICER JACK HAMMER
No way! Are you trying to bribe me?!

CARMELO
No puede pagar ahorita.

OMAR
Este ciudad no sirve para nada.

OFFICER JACK HAMMER
You got some kind of conspiracy going? What are you saying? Start walking-- let's go. I'm kicking you off the river, both of you.

(As they EXIT--)

CARMELO
All we want is access, Officer. Tell me, what's wrong with that?

OFFICER JACK HAMMER
This is a very dangerous channel. I could be saving your life.

CARMELO

We just want recreation on our local waterway, sir-- it's legal.

(Ridley crawls unsteadily from under the bush,
peers at the steep, concrete bank. He still has the
plastic bag wrapped around his neck.)

RIDLEY

Water flowing down, hill down, hill down like me, long way. No go slide fishing for my foot. My lungs. My funny brain. Is this reality? Dreaming am I real anymore?

MANIISAR

Dreaming is the world of the real.

RIDLEY

My brain catapults down banks of rock and fire.

MANIISAR

What are you on?

RIDLEY

Stillness and flying, my brain and me. To water, to water.

(Ridley hurtles down the bank, toward the river.)

MANIISAR

The water did this to you-- something in the water poisoned you.

RIDLEY

(halting, confused) Water poison...? No, water good.

MANIISAR

No good, no bad... look beneath the surface. Death is not the end.

RIDLEY

(afraid of her) Hungry ghost-- what do you want?

MANIISAR

(edging him to the water) To rise and fall with you, in and out of the earth, like breath, like water. Look beneath the surface, there he is... the boy you are to carry.

RIDLEY

(fleeing her) Get away from me. My brain is funny now. Can't think...

MANIISAR

We're past thinking, my friend. The waterwheel is turning, all that's left is to play your part.

(They are interrupted by the arrival of Joe Swift and Jade Kenton-Denton Green. Ridley crawls back under the bush as Joe and Jade pull out a sledgehammer and tools.)

JOE SWIFT

River's high.

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

First rain of the season-- water's more toxic now than any other time of year.

(Luis comes out of his house drinking coffee.)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Rain on this river usually means some kid's about to get washed out to sea.

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

That's another problem with concrete banks-- nothing to grab if you're drowning.

JOE SWIFT

Luis, this is Jade, she's the architect for greening the street.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

(nods at Jade) So how's this supposed to work?

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

We funnel dirty street runoff into a gravel catchment basin underground--

JOE SWIFT

Which will be under where your house is now.

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

The idea is to clean water the way Nature does-- filter it through the ground.

(Luis Otcho-o finishes his coffee, ready to work.)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

I meant how're we supposed to take my house down. You got a sledgehammer? Let me tear into this sucker.

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN
Ack!

JOE SWIFT
We're going to pull it apart so we can reuse the wood.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
For what?

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN
Sustainable garden. The boards will be used to make raised beds.

JOE SWIFT
Or maybe a fence.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
Wood's cheap and this shit is old.

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN
We have to model sustainability every step of the way.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
Gonna cost more in labor to reuse it, and the wood won't last as long.

JOE SWIFT
You have a better use of the lumber?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
Bonfire, man.

(Cachoo hurries up to them. She carries her phone-camera which she aims at Joe.)

CACHOO
Wait, wait-- I want to record this for my river doc.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
Hey, baby.

CACHOO
(surprised to see Luis) You look older during the day.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
Moonlight is my friend.

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

(checking her hair) You're making a documentary on the river?

CACHOO

(filming) For a class.

JOE SWIFT

I told her it was okay, we have a transparent process.

(As Joe and Luis work, Jade steps up.)

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

Jade Kenton-Denton Green. As part of the Master Plan for the Revitalization of the Los Angeles River we are greening Rio Street-- the first of 700 planned green streets in L.A. that will cleanse urban run-off, create wildlife habitat, improve air quality and beautify neighborhoods.

CACHOO

But why are you tearing down this man's house?

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

There have to be a few sacrifices.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

It's legit. My mother sold it to them.

JOE SWIFT

The property was condemned.

CACHOO

(to Luis) You're tearing down your own house?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

They're paying me.

CACHOO

(into her camera lens) Ironic. And sad.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

I'm good.

(Luis pulls Cachoo aside.)

Don't screw this up for me-- it's the only job I can get.

CACHOO

Where you gonna live?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

(sly) Probably the park they put up. (then-- maybe--) Or your place.

CACHOO

I live with my parents. I'm in high school.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

You look 18.

CACHOO

Yeah and you look like my dad.

(Jade has discovered something odd--)

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

What is this opening in the concrete over here?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

(Going back to work with Joe) A dude in an ascot jack-hammered it out yesterday.

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

Roger Vadim!! Va-damn it.

(The two men pull a railing loose from the porch,
begin stacking lumber. Cachoo follows Jade.)

JOE SWIFT

We all want to remove concrete-- but that's not the way to do it. The Army Corps' just going to plug it up.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Why take the concrete out?

CACHOO

Let Nature through! Right?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

You ever seen the river flood? I seen it like six inches from the top, raging-- knocking down trees and tossing boulders like popcorn. My mom told me she stood on the Sixth Street bridge during one highwater and saw a piano riding the waves beneath her. That current it'll smash a man to death.

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

The river runs faster because of the concrete walls.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

You release the river, it floods the city, don't it?

JOE SWIFT

We have a plan for an urban floodplain--

(Roger Vadim! leaps onto the scene with his
jackhammer. Cachoo films him.)

ROGER VADIM!

The bureau-crazy is too slow! We will all be dead before the Steelhead Trout return
to the river.

(Jade pulls Cachoo's phone-camera toward herself,
away from Roger.)

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

Roger, is such a showboat.

JOE SWIFT

Roger you can't bust holes wherever you want--

CACHOO

(Aiming her phone-camera at Roger) And you are...?

ROGER VADIM!

Roger Vadim!! *Avant garde* performance artist, concrete remover, revolutionary!

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Weren't you married to Jane Fonda? I thought you were dead?

ROGER VADIM!

You are thinking of my father-- the great filmmaker--

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

And Brigitte Bardot, too, right? Dancing barefoot on that table... ummm.

ROGER VADIM!

Do not speak of my mother in that tone!

JOE SWIFT
Roger, Brigitte Bardot is not your mother.

ROGER VADIM!
Could be, but never mind. I have a vision for the future of the river-- Ravage the concrete! Release the power of Nature!

(Roger Vadim! attacks the concrete with his jack-hammer.)

JOE SWIFT
Stop, Roger!

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN
You're ruining this for everyone. Go back to France.

ROGER VADIM!
Everyone hates a revolutionary-- at first. Until he becomes emblazoned on T-shirts and messenger bags--

(Roger tears open his jacket to reveal a T-shirt with his own image on it, *a la* Che Guevara.)

Call me River Boy!

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
You don't know nothing about this river.

ROGER VADIM!
I grew up on this river.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
Bull.

JOE SWIFT
Roger, you're going to get arrested if you keep doing this.

ROGER VADIM!
No one pays attention unless I am radical.

JOE SWIFT
It's not the way.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
Get out of my neighborhood. We got enough trouble without some whacked out Parisian getting all symbolic on us.

(Luis Otcho-o starts toward Roger, physically threatening him. Roger holds up his hand in submission.)

ROGER VADIM!
Okay, okay, okay.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
Go back to France, cheese-eater-- plenty of rivers there.

ROGER VADIM!
(to Cachoo) *S'il vous plait*, turn that off. (She does.) I grew up in Studio City.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
No wonder you're accent sucks.

(Roger's French accent slowly disintegrates. He really is from the Valley.)

ROGER VADIM!
I need the river, man, I need it. You don't understand. I come to your neighborhood because my part of the river has no life, no trees.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
Bust a hole over there, then!

ROGER VADIM!
I did. No one noticed. I've been going to the river since I was a child. When my parents fought, I escaped to the river.

CACHOO
Brigitte Bardot lived in Studio City?

ROGER VADIM!
(sheepish) I don't think Brigitte would mind my little fantasy. Roll it.

(Cachoo films him and his accent magically returns as he pulls a newspaper photo from his pocket.)

I want our river to be as beautiful as the Seine in Paris, which is also paved-- but it has concrete steps down to the river, for lovers and families and dogs to walk to the water-- hanging gardens in the side of it banks. We can be urban and beautiful-- safe and in harmony with Nature.

(Indicates the tattered newspaper photo.)

Like this. Like Paris.

(A lifetime of fighting for the river-- and pretending to be French-- weighs on him. He begins to cry.)

I can't take it anymore.

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN
(kind) Roger, we're getting there.

ROGER VADIM!

No, I need it now, the solace of water on my eyes, rushing over rocks. Wind brushing the sycamores and my skin. Hawks circling me up, carp diving me down. The river is more than water, it's a way of sustaining our spirits. I've lived in LA all my life and I will die here-- I can't wait fifty years, or twenty years-- I need my water now.

(As Roger walks away...)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
Frenchy, take it easy, you don't have to go... I get it... you need the water.

(Ridley waddles shakily out from his bush.)

RIDLEY
So do I, lost, dry, dry.

CACHOO
Oh, it's the turtle we saw last night. He crawled out of the storm drain.

RIDLEY
Tumbling in the waves...

(Ridley tries to head for the water, but he wanders.
He is in an altered state, poisoned.)

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN
That's a sea turtle-- what's he doing this far upstream?

JOE SWIFT
There's a colony of sea turtles in the river at Long Beach, living in the warm effluent of a power plant-- but I've never heard of any this far north.

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN
Something's wrong with him-- he shouldn't be coming out this time of day or in front of all of us.

RIDLEY
The undertow draws me down...

JOE SWIFT

Maybe he's taken in some kind of poison that's disoriented him--

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

We can't drink the river water-- neither should he, right?

RIDLEY

Going home...

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

Something poured into a storm drain. Turpentine, paint, motor oil, bleach--

JOE SWIFT

Animals like the sweet taste of anti-freeze-- which can cause this kind of confusion.

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

That's usually fatal--

CACHOO

Oh no-- (to Joe) Can you do something?

(Joe goes for an abandoned shopping cart.)

JOE SWIFT

We can try. (to Jade) Call the Aquarium. (to Cachoo) Get a blanket we can use to lift him into this shopping cart. (to Luis) Help me--

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

He could bite your hand off, man.

(Joe approaches Ridley, touches him gently.)

RIDLEY

Diving, deep diving, going deep.

JOE SWIFT

I don't think so.

(Luis doesn't move.)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

He's dying, let him be. Nothing we can do.

RIDLEY

Touch the water, I need to touch the water.

JOE SWIFT

I know, big guy. Let me try to help you. Come on-- let's get this plastic bag off you.

(Joe removes the plastic bag. Cachoo reappears with Isa Pino and a blanket, which they use to help Joe get Ridley into the shopping cart. Luis watches, unmoving, frozen.)

ISA PINO

Oh, this poor creature-- he has a fishhook in his foot.

JOE SWIFT

That's the least of his worries right now. Luis, give me a hand.

(Luis doesn't move. Isa sees this-- she helps.)

ISA PINO

Can you save him?

JOE SWIFT

I don't know.

JADE KENTON-DENTON GREEN

(on her cellphone) The aquarium wants to know should they come pick him up?

JOE SWIFT

I think it's faster if we bring him to them.

(As they struggle to get the big turtle into the shopping cart, Luis Otcho-o Authemont freezes, watching them.)

Luis, what are you doing? Help us.

(Luis doesn't move to help. They finally get Ridley in the cart and wheel him off. Cachoo goes with Joe and Jade. Isa Pino turns to Luis.)

CACHOO

I'll go with you-- (filming) What kind of turtle is this?

JOE SWIFT

Sea Turtle. *Lepidochelys olivacea*. Commonly called, Olive Ridley.

CACHOO

Ridley! Come on, Ridley, you can make it.

(After they are gone, Isa Pino stares at Luis.)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

(to Isa Pino) Why are you looking at me like that?

(She says nothing, stares at him.)

There was no helping that turtle. Only a fool would try.

ISA PINO

Who would walk away from a dying animal, a dying boy?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Only a fool would get himself killed for no reason-- no sense-- I'm not a fool.

ISA PINO

Are you a man? You stood and watched. I thought you were better than that, I thought I knew you and you were better than that. What happened to you?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

I was drunk. (remembering) At first I didn't think Ferko would do it-- then I could tell he would-- he got quiet, like my father did before he beat us. Ferko got quiet and smiled and Rana didn't know what was about to happen. I could tell he was a kid who'd never been beat. The little guy stood up to Ferko and Ferko shot him. Just like that, like it was nothing.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

(reaching for a beer) I'm sorry, Isa. I wish it was me instead of him.

ISA PINO

But it wasn't.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

No. Ferko pointed his gun at me, but I was too drunk to move-- he walked away laughing-- I wasn't even worth a bullet.

ISA PINO

You could've done something--

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Wouldn't've brought your brother back. (switching gears--) What's your deal, anyway, why're you so worried about me, what're you hiding?

ISA PINO
I'm not hiding anything.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
When people can't find peace they're hiding something.

ISA PINO
I'm not.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
You sure?

(Disturbed, she starts to leave, then turns back--)

ISA PINO
You stood and watched. That's what you do, you drink, then you stand and watch.

(She leaves. He swigs his beer, stands and watches her go. Music begins to build.)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
Am I wrong to be alive? Why am I always wrong? I freeze, I am afraid--

(He turns on his mother's house, throws his beer can at it. Music builds further under his lines...)

In this house you beat me and cursed me, you made me this way.

(He picks up the sledgehammer and SLAMS it into his mother's house.)

You knew I had nothing and you put me on the street.

(He SMASHES more of the house.)

It doesn't matter, I am a man, I am a man, I can't be afraid. How do other men know what to do? I am a fool, I am a coward, I am a failure--

(He SCREAMS as in the beginning and BATTERS his house-- DESTROYING IT.)

Twilight into Night

The Chorus of Flora and Fauna call the Twilight, easing Day into Night. Maniisar translates the Tong-va chant, *Yok e mo hut*.

MANIISAR

The owl is hooting.

Ruth Betsy peeks out from her abandoned car in the river, wondering if it's safe to come out. She sees no one, just a glint of light, an exquisite moment before the sun goes down, which mesmerizes her. She sits with her feet in the water, carving a reed, as Maniisar sings.

RUTH BETSY & MANIISAR

Beauty above me, beauty below

MANIISAR

The motherless one needs you.

(As Ruth looks over at Luis passed out among the ruins of his house, he begins to rouse.)

RUTH BETSY

He doesn't know who he is...

CORVUS

Caw!!!!

(The Crow swoops down, pecks at Luis Otcho-o, who rises from the wreckage, threatening Corvus with his spear-gun.)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Get off me! (surveying the destruction) What the hell did I do?

MANIISAR & RUTH BETSY

Beauty all around me, beauty that flows.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

I don't think they'll pay me for this.

RUTH BETSY

(carving away) Your mother says hello.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

(wielding his spear-gun in Ruth Betsy's direction) What? What about my mother?

RUTH BETSY

She showed me a secret.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Oh yeah? How much she hated her kids...?

RUTH BETSY

She didn't care about her kids-- everybody knows that.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Right.

RUTH BETSY

But she showed me a secret women are not supposed to know.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Leave me alone, nut job.

RUTH BETSY

I have to pass it on to you, nut job.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

I don't want any secrets from my mother-- I have too many already.

RUTH BETSY

I can make them but I can't play them. It's for you.

(She offers him the carved reed, now a flute. He doesn't move.)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

What is that?

RUTH BETSY

A flute. Your mother got a Tong-va shaman drunk and made him show her how to make sacred flutes. He broke the rules for her, she was so beautiful.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Yeah, she probably made it worth his while.

(She brings the flute to him. He doesn't take it.)

RUTH BETSY

I make them from the weeds-- the arundo.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
I don't want it.

(She leaves it for him among the rubble.)

RUTH BETSY
Doesn't matter what you want, it's yours.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
(reaching for a beer instead of the flute) I'm screwed, old lady. We're both screwed,
you and me.

(She turns on him, hard and fast.)

RUTH BETSY
Put that down!

(Startled, Luis Otcho-o releases the beer.)

And pick up that flute.

(He doesn't move, she stares at him, powerfully
focused.)

RUTH BETSY
Drink steals your power, Luis Otcho-o.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
I got no power.

RUTH BETSY
You play music like your grandfather.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
You knew him?

RUTH BETSY
You've got a long way to go before you walk in his shoes.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
I need a spirit animal.

(He reaches for his beer.)

RUTH BETSY
You are an old carp, used to living on poison. Lost your connection to who you are.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
What was he like, my grandfather?

RUTH BETSY
He played the flute.

(Luis puts down the beer, takes the flute.)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
I can play the flute.

RUTH BETSY
We'll see. (wandering away to the ducks) Quack, quack, quack.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
(Sings a bit of Ridley's song, as he picks up the flute and examines it.) *I have lost my connection to the flow of what has made me who I am.*

(As Luis plays the flute, Maniisar says...)

MANIISAR
Ahuuvoroyt. (Shaman.)

(The Chorus of Flora and Fauna come out to hear as he continues playing, and walks into the shadows. Isa Pino appears, heading for the garden with her sack of tools. To Ruth Betsy who calls the ducks and strews corn in the river--)

ISA PINO
(regarding Luis Yang-na's house) What happened? They took that down fast.

RUTH BETSY
Quack, quack, quack.

ISA PINO
Is he gone? Is Luis Otcho-o gone? Did you see him leave?

RUTH BETSY
The babies are growing up. Need their corn.

ISA PINO
Is he gone?

RUTH BETSY
Quack, quack.

ISA PINO
The ducks are good, Ruth. Don't throw corn in the water-- it chokes up the river.

(Ruth Betsy snaps, clicking her teeth as if to bite.)

RUTH BETSY
In Nature there is no such thing as waste. !Quack, quack, quack!

ISA PINO
Did Luis Otcho-o leave when they took down his house?

RUTH BETSY
(irritated) Hot box unfit for life. People in houses are lost, like you. Quack, quack.

ISA PINO
Am I lost?

RUTH BETSY
(crawling into her car) You're the one who's chasing ghosts.

ISA PINO
What?

(Ruth is silent, doesn't answer. Isa is alone in the water. Maniisar WARBLER like an egret-- then--)

MANIISAR
Step into the moonlight, the world of the real.

ISA PINO
Is that what I'm doing, chasing ghosts?

MANIISAR
Look beneath the surface.

ISA PINO
I'm afraid to look beneath the surface. Will I never hear Rana again? Never feel him at all? Is his soul in distress?

(Isa Pino kneels in the water, touches it. Luis plays the flute, calling Isa.)

ISA PINO (*SINGS - REPRISE OF 'THE GARDENER'S SONG'*)

*Give me a sign little brother, have you found peace?
The weight that's on my shoulders cries out for release
I wait with a hopeless heart... Where do the dead go?*

(Maniisar sings with Isa Pino-- a different song.)

MANIISAR (*SINGS - REPRISE OF 'THE WAYS OF WATER'*)

*Pour out your rage and fury, drain all your righteous wrath
The water's never judge or jury, just seeks out the easiest, the simplest path
Teach me the ways of water, float away truth and lies,
Drown me in absolution, dry me these tears, these tears I cry.*

MANIISAR

Look beneath the surface. Take in the water, what do you see?

(Isa Pino lies in the water, surrendering.)

ISA PINO

I see... Nothing. *Drown me in absolution...*

MANIISAR

Sedated by water, seduced by nothingness. Eternity stretching before you so sweet.

ISA PINO

I'm sorry, I'm sorry...

(Isa goes under. Corvus flaps her wings as Luis races to Isa Pino.)

CORVUS

Attention! Pay Attention! Caw, caw!

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

What the hell..... are you doing?! You're drowning in two feet of water.

(He pulls Isa out of the water. She gasps for air, spits river water, comes back to reality.)

ISA PINO

(devastated by the realization) Oh god, it's my fault, it's my fault--

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

What are you talking about?

ISA PINO

I gave him the nickname Rana. (agonizing) I'm sorry, I'm sorry, Rana. (to Luis, crying) I gave him the same name as Ferko-- why did I do that?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

It was not your fault.

ISA PINO

I sent him to the river to draw the birds. He wouldn't have been there except for me. Why did I call him Rana?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Rana's a frog, we live in Frogtown. There were frogs everywhere, remember? On the sidewalks, in the streets, down in the river. We raced them, down in the river, remember that night?

ISA PINO

Yes.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

We were children.

ISA PINO

Couldn't walk without stepping on frogs.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Such a girl, you rode on my back, you couldn't stand the frogs on your feet. Then I kissed you.

ISA PINO

First kiss.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

First kiss.

(They look at each other, the moment passes.)

ISA PINO

Rana loved the frogs. He kept bringing them in the house, trying to feed them.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

It was a good nickname for him. Not your fault.

(She's not sure she can accept that yet.)

You drank river water.

ISA PINO

Wasn't so bad.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

I was out here one night when I was in high school drinking with some of the gang dudes and they started getting heavy with me-- like I wasn't down with the neighborhood cause I wasn't in the gang. And so I say, 'If you're really down with neighborhood you'll drink a beer can full of that river water.' And they go, 'No way, fool, that shit is dark, that is polluted, eh?' So I guzzle a can of river water in front of them-- none of them will even take a sip, too scared. After that they were all, 'You're down with the neighborhood, no doubt- you're an honorary member.'

ISA PINO

So I'm down with the neighborhood because I drank from the river?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

No doubt. Isa, Rana's death was not your fault.

(Isa Pino breathes, knows--)

ISA PINO

Not yours either.

(Maniisar warbles like an egret, flaps her wings, marking the moment of release.)

MANIISAR

Auuuuk--auuuk.

ISA PINO

(picking up her brother's skateboard) Where do the dead go, Luis?

(A moment, he considers, then--)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

The Turtle crosses the water, connecting the land of the living to the land of the dead

ISA PINO

How do you know that?

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

A little bird told me.

(Luis Otcho-o Authemont plays his flute as Ridley, the Sea Turtle appears on the river-- crossing it. Music underscores this. Maniisar warbles and points to the turtle.)

ISA PINO

Is that the turtle...?

(As Ridley nears the other side, RANA, Isa's brother, APPEARS skateboarding on the concrete. Isa Pino falls to her knees, overcome.)

ISA PINO

Rana!

(Rana waves to her, peaceful, easy. The Turtle crosses to him, they DISAPPEAR. Isa Pino watches and weeps, both joyful and sad. Luis plays his flute-- a haunting, sacred melody that he remembers from some old place. Maniisar sings wordlessly with him. Ruth Betsy peers out from her car, witnessing, gently rocking herself.)

Dawn

As the music finishes, the sun rises-- and Maniisar translates the Tong-va chant, ***Yah mon he ne.***

MANIISAR

I am leaving.

(Joe Swift brings Cachoo back. She's been crying. When she sees Isa Pino, she starts crying again.)

CACHOO

The turtle died, Isa.

ISA PINO

I know.

JOE SWIFT

His organs shut down, there was nothing we could do.

CACHOO

He died, Isa, I was looking in his eyes, and he died right in front of me. Turtles are supposed to live like a hundred and seventy-five years or something. They said he was only like fifty.

ISA PINO

I saw him crossing the river.

CACHOO

What?

JOE SWIFT

What do you mean?

ISA PINO

I saw him-- he showed me my brother.

CACHOO

You saw the turtle's spirit?!

(They all go to the edge of the water.)

ISA PINO

He swam to the other shore, and there was Rana. Right over there.

CACHOO

You saw Rana?

ISA PINO

Yeah. Maybe it's all in my mind, but I don't care. The turtle showed me Rana's okay, he's at peace.

(Maniisar flies down to the hole in the concrete
and causes the sage to emerge.)

MANIISAR

Your brother is gone, long live your brother. The river is gone, long live the river.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

What's that?

JOE SWIFT

That's a native white sage. *Salvia apiana*.

MANIISAR

Kasili. A blessing plant..

ISA PINO

That's the sage I planted in the garden for Rana.

CACHOO

Ohmygod, that's like 24 hours! How is that possible?

JOE SWIFT

It's grown underground--

MANIISAR

Watered by the river.

ISA PINO

And now it's reaching for the sunlight.

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT

Nature don't wait.

CACHOO

Especially if we give it half a chance...

ISA PINO

It's a sign-- I'm going to plant it everywhere-- it'll break up the concrete-- it'll be beautiful.

JOE SWIFT

Roger's going to get his hanging garden after all..

CACHOO

(filming the little miracle) Damn! I knew this place was magical.

MANIISAR

(calls out in Tong-va) *Shiraaw''aa, Paxaayt, shiraaw''aa.*

(Maniisar warbles like an Egret and flies down to the place she first emerged. All the other Flora and Fauna move in around her, COOING, CROAKING, SHUSHING, WHISTLING, and CALLING, as in the beginning.)

Speak, my river, speak.

(Maniisar DISAPPEARS back into the earth.
Suddenly Corvus flies through cawing--)

CORVUS
My river! My river!

(Luis bends down to touch the water of the river.)

LUIS OTCHO-O AUTHEMONT
Right here the water never stops flowing. The river rebels right here. In the long run
it will have its way. I am the river.

(He drinks a handful of river water.)

FULL CAST (SEPARATELY, BUT WITH OVERLAPS)
I am the river.

(Isa Pino leads the cast in “We Are the River.”)

ISA PINO & THE CAST
We are the river.... The holder of water, the keeper of consciousness
We are the griever, the giver, the taker, bestower of all that’s blessed

(Roger Vadim! APPEARS, refreshed, waving a
petition, French accent and all! The song STOPS
as he addresses the audience--)

ROGER VADIM!
Bon soir! I have a petition I beg you all to sign.

(reading)

‘We demand the Army Corps of Engineers remove ALL the concrete from the Los
Angeles River *immediatement!*’

(to the audience, waving his petition)

Right here where we are standing is the best place to start! Sign the petition! I will
be waiting for you down by the river.

(The cast resumes the song!)

ALL (SINGING)
*Flowing beyond all sense
Flooding the banks, seeping under the fence
Making the world our home
Carving through canyons, eroding the stone*

*Drop by drop by drop
We are the river.*

*We are the River, the searcher the seeker, of everything we hold dear
Unstoppable River, the strong and the weaker, united renouncing fear*

*We are each other's home
Longing for shelter but destined to roam
Connecting us one and all
Streaming with life, pulled to answer the call*

*Drop by drop by drop
We are the river*

LIGHTS FADE.

END OF PLAY.